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SUBJECT: Large Numbers of Travelers Depart Guangzhou; Up to One Million Still Waiting

(U) This document is sensitive but unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Guangzhou's main train station continues to draw travelers, with estimates that as many as one million people remain stranded in South China. In the wake of two train-station-related deaths over the weekend, police erected additional roadblocks outside Friday's half-mile perimeter and now enforce strict access control, only allowing valid ticket holders near the train station. Authorities have created numerous special channels to transport passengers from city shelters to the station. Though power outages in parts of Guangdong continue, bus service has resumed after soldiers were sent to clear the province's icy northern roads. End summary.

¶2. (U) As many as 1 million people in Guangzhou are still waiting to travel home before New Year's Eve on February 6, according to media reports. Guangzhou Railway Company reportedly boarded 600,000 passengers onto departing trains February 1-3. Though no injury figures have been released, at least two people have died: a man from Hunan Province died February 1 from electrical burns suffered after jumping from an overpass onto an electric train; and a female watch factory worker from Hubei Province was trampled to death at Guangzhou's Railway Station Square February 2.

¶3. (SBU) Police instituted strict access control procedures February 4 and erected additional security barriers more than 1/2 mile from Railway Station Square. Congenoffs witnessed police deny entry to anyone without a valid train ticket for the current date of travel or the previous five days. Travelers slowly moved in groups through holding areas and checkpoints every 200 yards along main roads leading to the train station. Crowds that had previously gathered outside the station square have been disbursed, with the number of police equaling that of travelers at certain points inside the newly-reinforced security perimeter.

¶4. (U) Authorities have established a special waiting area for pregnant women and families with small children at a conference center near the train station, providing departure announcements at the shelter area and shuttle bus service to the train station. Bus passengers arriving from outside Guangzhou were taken to the new Canton Fair Pazhou Convention Center and given discounted meals as they waited for their train departures. Special non-stop subway trains convey passengers directly from the Pazhou shelter to the train station.

¶5. (SBU) Despite ongoing power outages in northern Guangdong Province affecting almost 750,000 residents, traffic along southern stretches of the Beijing-Zhuhai Highway resumed February 3. Thousands of power company workers and soldiers have been sent to restore power and clear ice from frozen roadways in recent days, with party officials visiting affected areas to inspect conditions.

Congenoff witnessed frequent departures at Guangzhou Bus Station February 4, although many northern routes were delayed or cancelled due to dangerous road conditions.

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